



2005

Post-Legislative Session Report

To the citizens of the 4th Legislative District

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Dear Friends & Neighbors,

After 105 busy days of talking with concerned constituents, attending committee hearings and caucus meetings, and voting on hundreds of bills, the 2005 legislative session has ended and is now in the books. **It feels great to be back in the district again with our family and friends.**

Of all the years we've had the honor of serving you in the Legislature, this was among the most difficult. We saw a lot of legislation pass that we opposed and believe will have a **negative impact on our state** — including our state operating budget. We'll discuss some of these issues in this newsletter.

The legislative scorecard in Olympia has Democrats holding majorities in both the state House and Senate, and controlling the governor's mansion. When you add it all up, very few Republican ideas on how to address the state's challenges were considered. This is disappointing because we think **citizens expect and deserve more bipartisanship from their elected officials.**

Thanks for taking the time to read our newsletter. We're anxious to hear what you think of our legislative session and the issues discussed here. Please give us a call or send us an e-mail if we can be of assistance.

In closing, we'd just like to say that **it's an honor and privilege to be able to serve as your state representatives.**

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

Rep. Lynn Schindler

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2005 Legislature



In 2004, Rep. Schindler was the driving force behind state funding for major safety improvements to Bigelow Gulch Road, including widening the road to four lanes with eight-foot shoulders on each side. Rep. Schindler participated in the groundbreaking in May.

photo: Valley News Herald

Representative
Lynn Schindler



Concerns with our state operating budget

Every two years legislators must pass a state operating budget that pays for things such as public schools, higher education, human services, government and judicial operations, and other special appropriations. This budget comes from your tax dollars and other revenue.

The good news is the state had **\$1.7 billion more in new revenue** for this budget than was available for the previous budget cycle. This provided legislators an opportunity to pass a budget **without raising taxes** or increasing any types of fees.

The bad news is the **majority party** decided to **raise taxes** despite the new revenue.

The end result is we now have a budget that puts off payment obligations, raids dedicated accounts, shifts money around, and increases taxes. When you add it all up, **state spending increased by 12.4 percent** — or **\$3 billion**. This was the biggest jump in 14 years.

We believe this approach is **unsustainable** for the future — something even **our governor acknowledged**. Yet, she supported it. By taking this path, we are setting our state up for a **large budget shortfall in the future** — something we cannot afford.

We need a sustainable budget that does not burden families and employers with new taxes. **Our budget directly affects the health of our economy.**

Next session, when the Legislature considers a mid-biennium supplemental budget, **we will advocate for less spending and no new taxes.**

I-601 set aside to clear the way for tax increases

In order to clear the way for a state operating budget that relies heavily on tax increases, the majority party had to first set aside I-601.

This **voter-approved measure**, passed in 1993, **sets state spending limits** by requiring a two-thirds majority vote of legislators to pass tax increases. In other words, legislators can't raise your taxes unless two-thirds of them in both the state House and Senate approve.

I-601 has **saved taxpayers more than \$4 billion** since voters put it in place. More importantly, it **gave citizens a voice** in the budget process. Through this initiative, citizens collectively said they expect the state to show **fiscal responsibility** and that **legislators should work together** in a bipartisan manner to **determine state priorities**.

We're disappointed the majority party put I-601 aside and feel it is a **breach of faith with citizens** who said they wanted protections against new taxes and out-of-control state spending.

New transportation package funds state, King County projects

A controversial transportation package passed on the last day of the legislative session after some bizarre political maneuvering.

This package will generate around **\$8.5 billion of new revenue** for vari-

ous projects around the state, with a majority of the funding going to the Seattle area.

The new revenue will be generated through a **9.5-cent tax increase on gasoline** phased in over four years, in addition to **new vehicle weight fees** and **higher fees** on drivers' licenses and plates.

We voted "no" on this package because at a time when gasoline prices are at an all time high, **families can't afford the extra financial burden.** While transportation and road projects are vitally important, now is not the time to ask families and employers to reach deeper into their pockets for state government. Increasing our gas tax is just going to **hurt our state's economic recovery.**

When you combine this gas tax increase with the nearly **\$500 million tax increase** in the majority party's **state operating budget**, it is too much to bear for citizens.

Election reforms don't go far enough

Election reform was a big part of the Legislature's agenda this year. Though we passed a few measures that address some of our state's election problems, the Legislature did not go far enough in addressing all citizens' concerns.

For example, one bill that passed requires people to show ID at the polls – but that can be something as simple as a utility bill. All voters must do to be eligible to vote is simply sign a statement saying they are.

Another problem that has gone unaddressed is that canvassing boards are still allowed to guess a voter's intent.

The bottom line is **we still have not done enough to restore voters' confidence** in our election system and prevent eligible voters from being disenfranchised.

We supported a comprehensive election reform bill that would have mandated that voters show a **photo ID at the polls**, required counties to **reconcile the number of ballots** with the **number of lawful voters**, and called for **voters to have a higher level of accountability.** The legislation did not pass.

We will continue to support election reforms that will **restore integrity to our voting process.**

Odds & Ends

The following are bills that were either passed or considered this session that we think you should know about. Please give us a call or send us an e-mail if you have any questions or concerns about them. Or, you can visit this website and plug in the bill number: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/billinfo/1/bills.cfm>

- **Giving California control of our auto emission standards (House Bill 1397)** – "Clean car" legislation passed that will hand over regulatory control of our state's clean air laws to California, despite the fact we don't have their smog or population problems. Legislators were initially told by a group that these new standards would improve air quality by 25 percent relative to our current federal standards, but they retracted and now say it's only around 2-3 percent (by 2016). We voted "no."
- **Dismantling the important changes to our unemployment insurance (UI) system (House Bill 2255)** – We made important changes to our UI system in 2003 that made it fair and equitable to all employers. This year, the majority party unraveled this agreement and sent a terrible message to employers about our state's business climate. We voted "no."



Representative Larry Crouse

*Rep. Crouse is ranking
Republican on the Technology,
Telecommunications &
Energy Committee.*



4th District

2005 Legislature

- **"Play or Pay" (House Bill 1702/Senate Bill 5637)** – This bill would have required employers to purchase health insurance for employees ("play") or face a tax penalty ("pay"). The plan would cost Washington employers more than \$1.6 billion a year and wipe out an estimated 25,000 jobs. We are strongly opposed to this costly plan. While it did not pass, we will vote "no" on any similar bill that comes before us.
- **State-mandated paid family medical leave (House Bill 1173/Senate Bill 5069)** – These measures would have forced all employers, regardless of size, to provide five weeks of paid family medical leave for workers. They would also be required to hold the job until the employee returns – something that can be difficult for small employers. Employers would administer, and employees would pay, a new tax to foot the bill for the program. This bill never made it to the House floor but, if it ever does, we will vote "no."

Public Works Trust Fund to benefit 4th District

The Public Works Trust Fund helps local governments get low-interest or interest-free loans from the state to finance the repair, replacement or improvement of a variety of public works projects, including bridges, roads, water and sewage systems, and solid waste and recycling facilities.

The 4th District will be receiving nearly **\$13.5 million** from the Public Works Trust Fund for three **water and roadway projects**. We want to thank those people who are locally involved with these projects for their hard work and dedication to our communities.

Survey results

In our February newsletter, we included a survey that asked you to rank what issues are most important to you and to provide feedback. We want to thank those of you who took the time to tell us your thoughts. **We appreciate your insight because it helps us as we consider issues and bills in the Legislature.**

From this survey, we learned that the following issues ranked most important to those who responded:

- **Crime/security** (received the most number one rankings);
- **Health care** (received the second most number one rankings, most number two rankings); and
- **Property taxes.**

Education and our **water supply** were two other issues that ranked high and we heard a lot about. Thanks again for your feedback!

